Smithsonian Associates

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November 2. 2024

Medieval History Through Artists' Eyes
Session 1: Constantine's Conversion to Christianity

Introduction
- Whence the notion of the "Dark Ages," "Middle Ages," "Gothic"?

The historical significance of Constantine the Great, d. 337 AD
- Battle of Milvian Bridge 312
- Edict of Milan 313
- Council of Nicaea 325
- "New Rome" at Constantinople 330
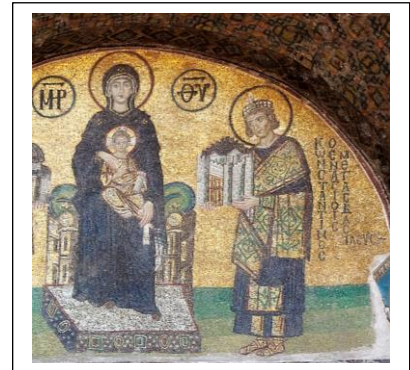
Transformations in art and architecture from pagan to Christian
- Basilica at Trier, 310
- Basilica Nova (Maxentius and Constantine), Rome, 305-312
- Arch of Constantine, Rome, 315
- Old St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, c. 324: *martyrium*; *basilican plan*: *nave, apse, transept, clerestory*
- S. Constanza (mausoleum of Constantine's daughter), c. 350 AD: *central plan*
- Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem: *martyrium and basilica*
- Catacomb of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus, 3rd-4th c.; Catacomb of Domitilla, 4th c.
- Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, d. 359

Combatting heresy and establishing canonical beliefs
- Council of Nicaea 325 – Christ, Son of God, "of one substance with the Father"
  - Apse mosaic in Santa Pudenziana, c. 400
- Council of Ephesus 431 – Mary "Theotokos," Mother of God
  - Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, 432-40

Constantinople and the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire
- Justinian I's Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) (532-537)
  - Constantine and Justinian mosaic (10th c.)
  - Theotokos ("Mother of God") mosaic
  - Iconoclasm 726-780, 814-842

Ravenna: Seeing Constantine's Legacy Through Artists' Eyes
- Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, 425-450
- S. Apollinare in Classe, 549
- San Vitale, 527-548

<u>**Suggested reading**</u> (see also art history videos at Khan Academy and Smart History)
- Peter Brown, <u>The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000</u> (10th anniversary revised edition), 2013 – or anything by this brilliant scholar of Late Antiquity
- Jas Elsner, <u>Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph</u>, Oxford and New York, 1998
- Andre Grabar, <u>The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200-395</u> (<u>Arts of Mankind</u> series; 9), London, 1967
- Richard Krautheimer, <u>Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture</u>, 1965, 2nd ed. 1981
- H.P. L'Orange, <u>Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire</u>, Princeton, 1967
- John Lowden, <u>Early Christian & Byzantine Art</u>, London, 1997
- **NEW:** Matthew Gabriele and David M. Perry, The Bright Ages. A New History of Medieval Europe, NY, 2021

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Session 2: Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance

"Throughout his whole reign, the wish that he had nearest to heart was to re-establish
the ancient authority of the city of Rome under his care and by his influence"

– Einhard, Life of Charlemagne

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What's the historical significance, legacy of Charlemagne, 768-814?
- "Father of Europe" – King of the Franks, King of the Lombards, "Holy" Roman Emperor
- "Second Rome" at Aachen
- "Holy" Roman Emperor crowned by Pope Leo III in 800; "New Constantine"
  - "Renovatio Imperii Romani" or "renewal of the Roman Empire"
- Carolingian Renaissance: education, monastic reform, Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin

How did artists respond to transformation of Frankish kingdom to "Holy" Roman Empire?
- Royal abbey at Lorsch, "triumphal arch" gateway, c. 780
- Gundohinus Gospels, Christ in Glory, 755
- Godescalc Gospels, Aachen, c. 781 – Earliest manuscript commissioned by Charlemagne, to commemorate his march to Rome, meeting with Pope Adrian I, and baptism of son Pepin
- Coronation Gospels, Aachen, 795 – according to legend, discovered in Charlemagne's tomb
- Palace Chapel at Aachen, 792-805; consecrated in 805 by Pope Leo III, Charlemagne's burial chapel
  - Inspired by Byzantine Emperor Justinian I's 6th c. San Vitale in Ravenna; spolia from Rome and Ravenna
- West vs. East: Three separate cultures: Catholic Western Europe, Orthodox Byzantium, Islam
  - Charlemagne's Libri Carolini (790s) vs. Byzantine iconoclasm (breaking of images)

The "Carolingian Renaissance": Alcuin of York (782-796) "The most learned man anywhere to be found"
- Celtic Ireland & Northumbria; Anglo-Saxon England
  - Celtic Tara Brooch, 7-8th c., Sutton Hoo treasure, 7th c.
- Book of Kells, Iona, c.800
- Lindisfarne Gospels, Northumbria, c.720
- Moutier Grandval Bible, from Alcuin's monastery of St. Martin's, Tours, 830 – Alcuin's corrected Vulgate Bible, Caroline minuscule

Charlemagne's Legacy: Holy Roman Empire, Art and Architecture
- The German Holy Roman Empire: Ottonians (919-1023) – Otto I, Otto II, Otto III
  - Otto II married Byzantine princess Theophanu
- Gospel Book of Otto III (Emperor 996-1002), Benedictine monastery of Reichenau, c. 1000
  - "Liuthar Group" of manuscript: Liuthar artist? scribe?
  - Gospel cover with Byzantine ivory
- St. Michael's, Hildesheim, c. 1022, Bishop Bernward; cf. early Christian Roman basilica
  - Column of Bernward, c. 1015; cf. Column of Trajan, Rome, c. 113; Bronze doors
- Gero Crucifix, Cologne, 970

Suggested reading:
- https://smarthistory.org/palatine-chapel-aachen/ + other topics
- https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/09/24/roman-empire-no-barbarians-necessary/
  Peter Brown review: New York Review of Books, September 24, 2020:
  - Judith Herrin, The Formation of Christendom, 1989; Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe, 2020
  - Janet Nelson, King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne, 2019

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Medieval History Through Artists' Eyes
Session 3: Monastic Reform and Public Piety Around 1100

"… It was as if the whole world were shaking itself free, shrugging off the burden of the past,
and cladding itself everywhere in a white mantle of churches…"
– Benedictine monk Rodolphus Glaber c. 1020 AD

The historical significance of the flowering of architecture, learning, public pilgrimage around 1100
- Monasteries as centers of spirituality and learning
- Monastic and church reform around 1100
- Cult of the Saints
- Public pilgrimage

Monasticism and Monastic Reform c. 1000: Belief into Experience
- The Egyptian Desert Fathers St. Anthony and St. Paul; eremitic (hermit) and cenobitic (communal) monasticism; Benedict of Nursia and his "Rule"
    - *Cf. Egypt and Ireland:* 5-6th c. apse of Red Monastery near Sohag, Egypt
    - Plan of St. Gall, c. 820
- Gregorian Reforms under Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085
    - Medieval concept of church and state: St. Augustine, *City of God*, 413
- Cluniac Benedictine reform; other new monastic orders around 1100
    - Cluny Abbey, founded 910; Cluny III, 1088
    - Benedictine monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, Spain, 1088

Cult of Saints / Cult of Relics: Meeting of Heaven and Earth
- Reliquary of St. Foy, Conques, 10th c.
- Arm Reliquary, "speaking" reliquary with arm bone of St. Pantaleon, 13th c.
- Reliquary of Pepin, Conques, 9th c.

Public Pilgrimage: Coming together of monastic spirituality and lay piety
- Pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela, Spain (Camino de Santiago)
- St. Sernin in Toulouse; site of 4th century basilica to Saint Saturnin, martyr and first bishop of Toulouse; c. 1080- 1120 "Romanesque" basilica with *stone vaulting, ambulatory,* and *radiating chapels*
- St. Mary Magdalene (La Madeleine) at Vézelay (1104-1140), relics of Mary Magdalene confirmed 1050
- Sainte-Foy (St. Faith) in Conques, abbey founded 819; 866 relics of virgin martyr St. Foy brought to Conques; basilica c. 1050- c.1130. Sculptured West Façade Tympanum: Last Judgment

Suggested reading
G. W. Bowersock, *The Crucible of Islam*, 2017
    Cf. Peter Brown, "At the Center of a Roiling World," New York Review of Books, May 11, 2017: https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/05/11/gw-bowersock-muhammad-center-roiling-world/
Michelle P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (2003)
    Cf. William Dalrymple, "The Egyptian Connection," October 23, 2008 review of Michelle Brown's book on the Lindisfarne Gospels and the links to monasteries in Coptic Egypt: https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/10/23/the-egyptian-connection/
Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, (1961) 1982
Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (1981) 2015
William Melczer, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, N.Y.: Italica Press, 1993--translation of 12th century pilgrim's guide

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Session 4: The 12th-Century Renaissance and the Gothic Cathedral

The historical significance of the 12th century Renaissance

- Capetian Kingdom – bishops and cathedrals
- Rise of Universities – Bologna (1088); Paris (1150); Oxford (1167); Cambridge (1209)
- Scholasticism and Reason
  - Peter Abelard, "Sic et Non," 1120, 158 questions
  - Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," 1265-1274, synthesizes Aristotelian philosophy with Christianity
- Cult of the Virgin – "Notre Dame" in Gothic spirituality: Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Mediator, Bride of Christ, the Church
  - St. Bernard of Clairvaux, d. 1153
- Art & Spirituality
  - Abbot Suger of St. Denis on his new construction (1144)
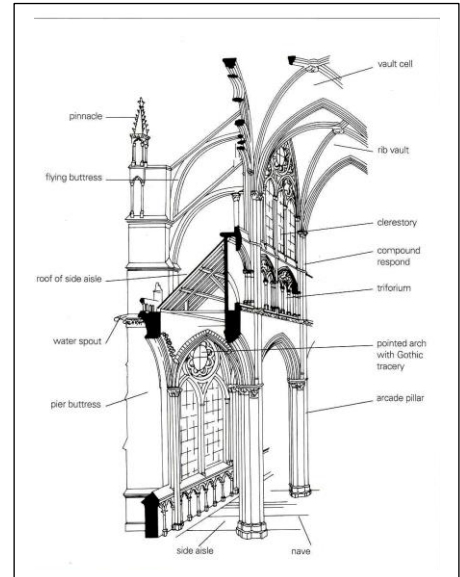
A New Way of Building: the Gothic cathedral

- Architectural/structural/technological experiments
  - Ribbed vaults; flying buttresses; bay system
  - Diaphanous wall: arcade, triforium, clerestory
  - Notre-Dame, Chartres, 1194-c. 1220 - 121 ft.
  - Notre-Dame, Reims, begun 1210 - 125 ft.
  - Notre-Dame, Amiens, begun 1220 – 139 ft

A New Way of Seeing: sacred history in sculpture and stained glass

- West façade of Reims; transept portals at Chartres
  - Sacred history and the kings of France: Abelard on redemptive love
- Chartres Cathedral's stained glass

New Purposes of Art

- Abbot Suger of St. Denis on mystical vision, mystical union
- Paradox? Reason in service to spirituality, transcendence

Suggested Reading (besides innumerable recent books on individual cathedrals)

Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions*, New York, 1996

Charles Radding and William Clark, *Medieval Architecture, Medieval Learning. Builders and Masters in the Age of Romanesque and Gothic,* New Haven and London, 1992

Philip Ball, *Universe of Stone: Chartres Cathedral and the Invention of the Gothic,* 2008

Georges Duby, *Art and Society in the Middle Ages*, 2000

Older in many respects but still invaluable and readable overviews:

Emile Male, *The Gothic Image,* (1913) 1972

Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, 1951

CODA: "The Christian regions of the Mediterranean world – Spain, southern Gaul, Italy, and the Eastern empire – maintained and transformed legacies which they had inherited directly from Roman times. Further to the north, however, a significant break had occurred...A sense of the Roman past was replaced by a different past – the past of the Old Testament. This past was brought close through the Holy Scriptures." (Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christianity. Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000*, 2013, p. 141)